

**Lake County ADA Paratransit
Rider's Guide**

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Lake County ADA Paratransit Rider's Guide

Available in alternate format (large print or tape) upon request

Meeting Our Customers' Travel Needs

This Rider's Guide provides information about Lake County's 100% accessible Fixed Route service "LakeXpress" as well as more detailed information about Lake County Connection "Paratransit" service - how to become eligible to use the service, where it operates, the days and hours of service, how to request a ride, fares, and other important information.

Fixed Route Bus Service

The Lake County Board of County Commissioners is committed to providing transportation services that can be used by all of our customers. All "fixed route buses" (larger buses that operate on set routes) have ramps and are low-floor with a kneeling feature to better serve riders who use wheelchairs or have difficulty getting up and down the bus steps.

Our fixed route buses are 100% "wheelchair accessible".

For everyone's benefit, drivers announce major stops, intersections, and transfer points to help riders recognize their bus stop or point of transfer. A limited number of seats are usually available near the entrance for persons who have difficulty standing while the bus is moving. Reserved spaces with tie-down straps and driver assistance are available for riders who use wheelchairs to provide a safe and secure ride.

LakeXpress issues reduced-fare cards for senior citizens and disabled riders. This card allows an eligible individual to travel at a discounted rate when traveling on a fixed route bus.

For route and schedule information, or any questions you may have about using the fixed route bus, call (352) 326-8637. Florida Relay 711 for TDD users.

Paratransit Service

For eligible riders who have a disability that prevents them from making some or all of their trips on fixed route buses, Lake County Connection offers a shared ride, door-to-door service called Paratransit. This service is sometimes called "ADA Paratransit Service" because it is provided as part of our efforts to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (or ADA). Paratransit service must be reserved at least one day in advance. The service is provided with lift-equipped minibuses or lift-

equipped vans. ADA Paratransit service operates in the same areas and during the same days and hours as the fixed route bus. The service can be used for any trip purpose.

If you still have questions after reading this Rider's Guide, you can call the Paratransit office at 352326.2278 or 711 if you use a TTY). On request, copies of this Rider's Guide will be provided in large print, or audio-tape.

How to Apply for Paratransit Service

Individuals interested in using Paratransit must first be determined eligible for the service. The eligibility review considers each person's functional ability to use the fixed route bus. If a disability or health condition prevents you from using fixed route buses under any conditions, you might be determined "unconditionally eligible," ADA Category 1 Unconditional Eligibility

If you can use fixed route buses some of the time, but not at other times, you will be determined "conditionally eligible" for those trips that you cannot make by bus. To receive information about the eligibility process, call the Paratransit office, and ask to have the Paratransit eligibility information mailed to you. The application form needs to be completed by you or for you, and mailed to the office.

After the completion of the application process, you will be notified in writing of your eligibility status within 21 days. You will also receive either a Paratransit eligibility card if you are determined eligible for Paratransit services, or you may receive a reduced fare card if you are not eligible for Paratransit services if your disability qualifies a reduced fare program.

If a decision is not made within 21 days of a completed application process, Paratransit service will be provided until a final decision is made.

Once you receive your eligibility notification, if you do not agree with the decision that is made, you can appeal the decision to a review panel by following the information outlined in your eligibility letter.

To begin the eligibility process, call the Paratransit office at 326- 2278 or 711 if you use a TTY).

Who is Eligible for Paratransit Service?

The ADA regulations provide that a person may be eligible for Paratransit services under one of the following three categories:

I. Category 1 Eligibility (Unconditional Eligibility)

The first category of eligibility includes those persons who are unable to use fully accessible fixed route bus services. Included in this category is:

“Any individual with a disability who is unable, as a result of a physical or mental impairment (including a vision impairment), and without the assistance of another individual (except the operator of a wheelchair lift or other boarding assistance device), to board, ride, or disembark from any vehicle on the system which is readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.” [Section 37.123(e) (1) of the ADA regulations]

This applies to an individual who cannot independently negotiate the fixed route bus system (board, ride or disembark from a bus).

II. Category 2 Eligibility (Conditional Eligibility until the fixed route bus system is fully accessible)

The second category of eligibility includes “Any individual with a disability who needs the assistance of a wheelchair lift or other boarding assistance device and is able, with such assistance, to board, ride and disembark from any vehicle which is readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities if the individual wants to travel on a route of the system during the hours of operation of the system at a time, or within a reasonable period of such time, when such a vehicle is not being used to provide designated public transportation on the route.” [Section 37.123(e) (2) of the ADA regulations]

This applies to an individual who would be able to use the fixed route bus system if it were accessible (e.g., if a low-floor or lift-equipped bus is not available). This category is not required once a transit system is 100% accessible. Because LakeXpress is 100% accessible, this category is not required.

III. Category 3 Eligibility (Conditional Eligibility)

The third category of eligibility includes: “Any individual with a disability who has a specific impairment-related condition which prevents such individual from traveling to a boarding location or from a disembarking location on such system.” [Section 37.123 (e) (3) of the ADA regulations] This applies to an individual who, because of his/her disability, cannot access a bus stop or a rail station to board the fixed route bus system and cannot access his/her final destination after disembarking from a fixed route bus or train. Eligibility is determined each time the eligible customer calls. Two important qualifiers to this category are included in the regulations. First, environmental conditions and architectural barriers not under the control of the public entity do not, when considered alone, confer eligibility. Inconvenience in using the fixed route bus system is not a basis for eligibility.

Temporary Disabilities

Temporary eligibility is provided to customers who have a temporary disability that prevents them from using the LakeXpress bus system. Eligibility will be provided for the expected duration of the disability.

Service for Visitors

Visitors to the Lake County area may use Paratransit for up to 21 days a year by providing documentation that they have been determined eligible for similar ADA Paratransit services by a transit agency in another part of the country. Visitors who do not have this kind of eligibility because they live in areas without public transit service might be asked for documentation of their health condition or disability.

Recertification of Eligibility

Each Paratransit customer must be recertified upon reaching his/her eligibility expiration date. It may also be necessary from time to time, if the condition of the disability changes, to re-evaluate an individual's eligibility. Typically, eligibility extends for two (2) years from certification. A customer's ADA Paratransit Identification Card will indicate his/her Paratransit eligibility expiration date. It is the customer's responsibility to reapply for services prior to his or her eligibility expiration date. If a customer fails to renew Paratransit eligibility, he/she will be ineligible for service until he/she is determined eligible in the certification process.

Paratransit Identification Card

Your Paratransit Identification Card will be mailed at the time eligibility has been determined. Your Paratransit ID card counts as a reduced fare card for a reduced fare when you ride LakeXpress fixed route.

Paratransit Service Area and Service Hours

Paratransit is designed to be "comparable to" (or similar to) the LakeXpress fixed route bus service. For this reason, ADA Paratransit service is only required to transport riders to and from locations which are within three-quarters (3/4) of a mile of where, and during the same days and hours of existing fixed route bus services. Points of origin and destination not within this three-quarters (3/4) of a mile corridor are not eligible for ADA Paratransit service and will not be provided.

For early morning service before 7:00 am and evening service after 6:00 pm, service will only be provided if it falls within ¾ of a mile of a fixed route service operating during these times.

Service Days and Hours

Service is available Monday – Friday. Weekend and holiday service is not provided.

Fares

The one-way fare for Paratransit service is \$2.00. The fare must be paid when boarding the vehicle. Riders who do not have fare will not be transported.

Note: Drivers are not permitted to accept tips. If you would like to commend a driver for service provided, call 326.2278 (or 711 if you use a TTY).

Scheduling Rides on Paratransit

You can reserve your Paratransit ride from 1 to 14 days in advance of your trip. The Paratransit scheduling office takes trip requests Sunday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

How to Reserve a Ride

All trips are scheduled through the Paratransit Office. To request a ride, call the Paratransit Scheduling Office at 326-2278.

Scheduling Tip:

The reservation agent will guide you through the process of reserving a ride. The reservation agent will ask for the following information. Have this information ready when you call:

1. Your first and last name.
2. The date and day of the week you need to ride.
3. The street address where you need to be picked up.
4. The street address where you are going, any point of reference that might help the driver find the location.
5. The time you would like to arrive (the appointment time, if applicable).
6. The time you will be ready to be picked up for a return trip (if applicable).
7. If a personal care attendant or companions will be traveling with you.
8. If a service animal will be riding with you.
9. Any other information you feel we should know to safely and comfortably serve you.

The reservation agent will enter this information into a computer scheduling system; determine if you are eligible for the trip, and identify a vehicle that is available to serve you. The reservation agent may sometimes need to put you on hold while the best travel option is identified or will take your information and call you back. The Reservationist will repeat what they understood your request to be. Pay close attention to what is repeated back to you. It is helpful to use a calendar or journal to note the date of call, time of call, and the person you spoke with to assist you and us in researching any concern regarding scheduling that you might have.

Your "Ready Time" and "Ready Window"

After you have provided the above trip information, the reservation agent will offer you your trip options. We will make every effort to offer you a pick-up and drop-off time that is as close as possible to the times you requested. Because Paratransit is a shared-ride service, and other customers may need to be scheduled on the same vehicle, it may be necessary to get you to your appointment a little early or pick you up for a return a little later than your request.

The actual pick-up time that is offered and accepted by you will be your Ready Time. The reservation agent will then note that a Paratransit vehicle might arrive up to 30 minutes after your Ready Time. This is called the 30 minute Ready Window. This window of time is needed to group rides and to accommodate unexpected traffic conditions, weather conditions or other delays and schedule changes. It is important that you be ready to meet the Paratransit vehicle during this 30 minute "window" of time.

Scheduling Tips:

Although it is difficult to know ahead of time exactly when you will be ready for your return trip, it is very important to schedule the time as accurately as possible. Leave some extra time if you are not sure.

Every effort will be made to schedule your trip so that you do not arrive more than 30 minutes before your requested drop-off time and no later than your requested drop-off time.

Every effort will be made to schedule a return pick-up no later than 60 minutes after the time you have requested and no earlier than the time you have requested.

Every effort will be made to schedule trips so that travel times are comparable (not more than twice) the time it would take to make the trip by fixed route bus.

Out of courtesy for other Paratransit customers who are scheduled on the same vehicle, the driver will wait no longer than five (5) minutes after their arrival time within the ready window. The vehicle will depart when the five-minute period is up. Riders must be ready to depart at any time during the thirty (30) minute ready window described when the reservation was made. If a rider has not boarded the vehicle within five (5) minute after the vehicle arrives, the vehicle will depart and a no show will be assessed to the rider's record. If the trip is the originating trip of the day (1st trip of the day) a bus will not be sent back (unless we were in error in scheduling or the driver was at the wrong location).

Scheduling Multiple Trips

You can request up to three (3) round-trips per call. If you have more than three roundtrips you need to schedule, please call back to schedule these other trips. This limit on scheduling has been set to minimize the telephone hold times for all customers. It can

sometimes take 5-8 minutes to schedule each trip, or even longer if you have conditional eligibility.

The limit on the number of trips scheduled at one time helps to keep the phone lines from being tied up for long periods. When minimal phone wait times permit, additional trip requests may be made during your original call. Ask the scheduler if you can make additional trip requests.

Subscription Service

If you need a ride to the same place, at the same time, at least once a week, "Subscription Service" may be a good option for you. This service allows you to schedule these trips with one call. You will then be automatically placed on the schedule each week. Ask the reservation agent about this option.

If you are receiving "Subscription Service," it is important to let us know immediately if you don't need a ride on a particular day. This way, we can make the change on our schedules. For example, if you have "Subscription Service" for a trip to school each weekday, keep us updated on holiday and vacation times when school is not in session or

Scheduling Tips: When you call to schedule trips, have a pen and paper handy so you can write down important information like your pick-up Ready Time and the 30 minute Ready Window when you need to be ready for the bus.

If you are scheduling several trips, have all of the information for each trip available when you call. This will help the reservation agent serve you efficiently.

If Your Appointment is Running Late

Everyone has occasional circumstances outside of their control that can cause delays at a scheduled appointment. If your appointment is running later than you expected and there is a chance you will not be ready for your scheduled return trip (or if you have missed the bus), call the Paratransit office as soon as possible. Your request will be coordinated with the Dispatch office that stays in radio contact with drivers. You will be asked:

1. Your name.
2. The time of your scheduled return trip pick-up

Every effort will be made to adjust your return trip pick-up time and assign another bus to pick you up at a later time. Because schedules are set the day before, there may be a delay of 90 minutes or more before another vehicle is available to accommodate your trip, or another bus may not be available. Remember: Allow extra time for medical appointments or other appointments that may take longer than expected. This will reduce the unnecessary cost of sending an additional vehicle.

NOTE: If a bus is sent and you are not ready, you will be assessed a no-show. If you call to change your appointment because you are running late, you will be assessed points in accordance with the "No Show Policy" for the scheduled trip.

How to Cancel a Scheduled Ride

If you have scheduled a ride that you no longer need to take, please call the Paratransit Scheduling Office as soon as possible to cancel, with required notice prior to 5 p.m. the day before your scheduled pick up.

No Show Policy

A no-show occurs when all four of the following circumstances have occurred:

- The customer (or the customer's representative) has scheduled ADA paratransit service.
- There has been no call by the customer or his/her representative to cancel the scheduled trip two or more hours before the start of the pick-up window.
- The paratransit vehicle has arrived at the scheduled pickup point within the specified 30-min pick-up window.
- The driver has waited at least two full minutes beyond the beginning of the 30-min pick-up window, but the customer has failed to board the vehicle.

A cancellation occurs when the customer (or the customer's representative) calls and speaks to a paratransit reservation or dispatch staff member before the beginning of the pick-up window and specifies that a scheduled trip is to be canceled.

The agency computer system keeps track of each trip a customer has requested, scheduled, taken, cancelled, and no-showed. When a no-show occurs, the computer data will be used to calculate the percentage of no-shows that have occurred in that customer's scheduled trips for the preceding 6 months. When the no-show percentage reaches 3%, the customer will be advised verbally of the no-show policy and a letter will be sent to the customer's residence with a copy of the policy enclosed.

When the no-show percentage reaches 5%, the customer will be issued a notice of a 3-day suspension of ADA paratransit service, subject to the appeals hearing process. With each successive no-show, the percentage will be recalculated. If the percentage is equal to or greater than 5%, each successive no-show (within 6 months of the last suspension) will result in the length of suspension as follows:

Second occurrence—5 consecutive day suspension.

Third occurrence—10 consecutive day suspension.

Fourth occurrence—15 consecutive day suspension.

Fifth occurrence—20 consecutive day suspension.

Sixth occurrence—25 consecutive day suspension.

The policy is designed to identify those customers who have a pattern and practice of violating the no-show policy based on their frequency of use. All punitive or corrective measures are applied to those customers with a documented frequency of violations within the previous 6 months. No corrective action is applied to the infrequent violator; that is, one with no-shows of less than 5% of scheduled trips. The focal point of this policy is to first gain customer cooperation through education. Punitive measures are

used only as a secondary measure and only when (1) educational efforts have failed to gain the needed cooperation, and (2) there is a sufficient pattern and practice of no-shows to cause an accumulated no-show rate of at least 5% within a 6-month period.

Appeal Process

You can appeal your service suspension by making either a verbal or written appeal of suspension within seven (7) calendar days after the date of the Letter of Suspension, and no later than the date listed on the letter. Verbal request can be made by calling (325) 326-2278 or (711) if you use a TTY.

An Administrative Review is performed for all appeal requests. The Administrative Review is designed to evaluate the applicant's record to insure that all the appropriate steps were taken during the Suspension process and that the suspension is justified based on the information. No additional evidence or new information will be considered during the Administrative Review.

Upon completion of the Administrative Review, the initial suspension will be changed if material oversights are identified. If the initial determination is changed as a result of an Administrative Review, the passenger will be provided written notification of the change. If the initial suspension is not changed as a result of the Administrative Review, the appeal request will be forwarded to the Suspension Review Board (SRB) for a formal appeal hearing. The SRB will consist of three members as follows:

Two members to be chosen by the Transportation Operator from its employees, and
One member of The Transportation Department, Community Services, Lake County Board of County Commissioners

None of the three SRB members for an appeal may be persons who were involved with the initial suspension determination.

The passenger may decide whether or not to attend the formal appeal hearing. Should the passenger require transportation to and from the hearing, the Transportation Operator will make the necessary arrangements. Either the passenger or his or her designated representative or both may be present at the appeal hearing. The Operator will tape record any hearing and make one copy of the tape available at no charge to the passenger upon request.

The passenger may present information, including additional evidence or new facts, and arguments in person orally and/or in writing at the time of a formal appeal hearing. The SRB may also request additional documentation as necessary. Written appeal statements are not required. The SRB may request additional information or clarification from the ADA paratransit staff regarding any issue raised by the passenger. If, after 30 days following the formal appeal hearing, the SRB has not made a final appeal decision, the applicant shall be treated as eligible for ADA paratransit on an interim basis and will be provided with ADA paratransit service until the SRB issues a decision.

After the SRB has made its final appeal decision, it will provide the applicant with written notification of its decision and the reason for the decision. Should the decision letter be requested in an accessible format, the Operator will accommodate the request.

Traveling on the System

When the Paratransit Vehicle Arrives

The Paratransit driver will pull the vehicle up to the curb in front of the pick-up address you provided, unless something is preventing them from doing so, then they will park as close as possible to the location. The driver will come to the door unless prevented by unusual circumstances.

The vehicle might arrive up to 30 minutes after your Ready Time. Please be ready to go when the vehicle arrives so that the driver can stay on schedule for all customers. The driver is not permitted to honk the horn to let you know the vehicle has arrived, so wait in an area where you can see or hear the vehicle arrive or where the driver will be able to see you.

Please note that the vehicle may arrive anytime within the 30 minute Ready Window and that drivers can only wait for you for 5 minutes after they have arrived. If you are not ready, the driver may have to leave to avoid inconveniencing other riders.

Driver Assistance

Paratransit is a door-to-door service. Drivers will assist you as you enter and exit the vehicle. Drivers also operate the wheelchair ramp or lift and will assist customers with the securement of wheelchairs and mobility aids, and with seat belts. Bring only what you can carry on or off in one trip. Drivers do not provide assistance loading or unloading groceries.

IF YOU BRING MORE GROCERIES THAN YOU CAN CARRY IN ONE TRIP OR YOU DELAY THE DEPARTURE OF THE BUS BEYOND 5-MINUTES, YOU WILL BE ASSESSED A NO SHOW.

Personal Care Attendants

A Personal Care Attendant (PCA) is someone you may bring with you to assist you with traveling or with personal care or activities. One (1) PCA may ride for free when traveling with you. A PCA must get on and off the bus at the same places and times as you.

To be able to have one PCA ride free with you, you must be registered with us as needing a PCA. This is done as part of the eligibility process. If you did not indicate a need for a PCA when you first applied to be eligible for Paratransit and now need a PCA, you should call 326-2278 and request that a new application form be mailed to you.

You will need to tell the reservation agent when you schedule trips that you will be traveling with a PCA. This ensures that there will be room on the vehicle for you, your PCA, and other scheduled riders.

Guests/Companions

A guest/companion is someone you want to bring along to share the trip, not someone you must bring to assist you. Guests/companions must pay a fare when accompanying you, and must get on and off the vehicle at the same place and time as you.

You will need to tell the reservation agent when you schedule trips that you will be traveling with one or more guests/companions. Drivers cannot add riders who do not have a reservation.

If you make a reservation for them, you are always entitled to bring one guest/companion with you. Additional guests/companions will be accommodated if there is enough space on the vehicle.

Children

All children under six (6) years of age must be accompanied by an adult. They cannot ride unattended. If traveling with an eligible fare-paying adult, children under five (5) may ride for free.

Wheelchairs and other Mobility Aids

Paratransit vehicles are designed to accommodate most wheelchairs and mobility aids. It is recommended that you use the lap belt for your safety. It is our policy that we will not transport mobility aids that exceed the common wheelchair dimensions defined under the American with Disabilities Act of 1990.

We will not transport your wheelchair or mobility aid exceeds the following dimensions:

- More than 30 inches wide
- More than 48 inches long
- When occupied, exceeds 600 pounds

Scooters

Some three-wheeled scooters are difficult to secure on Paratransit vehicles. Some scooters also come with a warning from the manufacturer that they should not be used as seats on moving vehicles. Because of this, the driver may recommend that you transfer to a vehicle seat if you can do this. While the driver will not require you to transfer, we strongly recommend that you do so we can provide you and other customers with the safest ride possible.

Wheelchair Securement and Seat Belt Policy

It is the driver's responsibility to ensure that mobility devices are properly secured. Wheelchair/scooters are required to be secured into the four point securement system at all times during the ride. We request that riders allow operators to secure the lap belts to ensure the customer's safety.

Respirators and Portable Oxygen Equipment

Portable oxygen equipment and portable respirators are permitted on all vehicles. Drivers are not permitted to assist you in using this equipment. If you need assistance with portable life support equipment, please arrange to bring a qualified attendant along with you.

Service Animals

Riders may travel with a service animal. Service animals include guide dogs, signal dogs, and other animals trained to work or perform tasks for persons with disabilities.

You are responsible for the care and supervision of your animal while on board. If you are planning on riding with a service animal, please follow these guidelines:

- The animal must be under your control and behave appropriately.
- The animal must not be aggressive towards people or other animals

Pets

Animals that are not service animals may ride on Paratransit vehicles only if they are properly secured in a cage or kennel. For safety reasons, drivers are not permitted to carry cages or kennels on or off of Paratransit vehicles. If you need assistance with a pet, please arrange to travel with someone who can help you.

Rider Courtesy and Conduct

- No smoking on the vehicles.
- Riders shall maintain appropriate, reasonable personal hygiene.
- No eating or drinking on-board (unless required for health reasons).
- No riding with open containers of alcohol or with illegal drugs.
- No abusive, threatening, or obscene language or actions.
- No deliberate fare evasion.
- No physical abuse of another rider or the driver.
- No petting guide dogs or other service animals without the permission of the owner.
- No playing of radios, cassette tape players, or compact disk players (without headphones), or other noisy equipment while on-board.
- No operating or tampering with any vehicle equipment.
- Littering is prohibited.
- Shirts and shoes or other footwear must be worn.
- Baby strollers must be folded and stowed to not block the aisle or cause injury to persons on the bus.
- Head, arms and other body parts must be kept inside the bus.
- Objects must not be thrown from the bus window.
- Parents must control children.
- Federal regulations prohibit the transportation of flammable or explosive materials on transit vehicles.
- Weapons are prohibited on buses.

Riders, their personal care attendants or companions traveling with riders, who violate rules of courtesy and conduct, may be subject to penalties, up to and including suspension of service.

Riders, their personal care attendant or companions traveling with riders, who engage in physical abuse or cause physical injury to another rider or driver, or who engage in other illegal activities, may be subject to immediate suspension from receiving Paratransit service. They may also be subject to possible criminal prosecution, which may include fines.

Riders or their personal care attendant or companions, who engage in an activity that disrupts the safe or effective operation of Paratransit services, may also be subject to a suspension of service.